

Iowa Current Developments

A Harrison County farmer plants no-till soybeans into corn residue.



June 2011, Iowa Current Developments
USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service
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"Iowa Natural Resources Conservation Service: Excellence in helping people conserve and improve our natural resources, communities and environment."

A Message from the: **State Conservationist**



*Rich Sims,
State Conservationist*

Conservation Compliance – Is There a Better Way?

This year we piloted a different way to accomplish conservation compliance in Areas 1 and 4. A few Iowa NRCS employees volunteered to help document conservation compliance via airplanes last month. Overall, we completed conservation compliance reviews on 635 sites in 40 counties.

We completed these aerial conservation compliance flights to provide a more consistent and better way to separate the producers who apply their

conservation plans from the ones who do not. Here are a few of the highlights:

- » We accomplished the task at one-third of the estimated cost.
- » A total of five people were involved with the visual review.
- » A GPS tool took planes directly to the sites.
- » Preparation, and more specifically, the flight plan was critical.
- » The amount of ephemeral gully erosion in fields with soybean residue stood out.

When we spotted a field that was questionable, we still followed up with boots on the ground. It is a requirement to complete a field review if a person is identified as "NA."

I will analyze the different findings between Area 1 and 4, and see how we can make this a better process next year. Read more about the compliance flights and view a few sample aerial photographs on page 2.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Richard Sims".

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Taking to the Skies: Iowa NRCS Conducts Compliance Flights

A handful of Iowa NRCS technical experts took to the skies with contracted pilots last month to conduct aerial conservation compliance reviews on 635 sites in about 40 counties in northwest and southwest Iowa.

The 1985 Farm Bill requires NRCS to check a random sampling of highly erodible fields each year to ensure farmers are following the provisions in their conservation plans. Conservation compliance is required for maintaining eligibility for USDA programs. Status reviews in the remaining 60 counties will be conducted on the ground.

"Other states have been using aerial surveys to save time and resources for several years," said State Conservationist Richard Sims. "We implemented this pilot project to see if we could increase our efficiencies and effectiveness while maintaining accuracy and fairness."



Photos:

Top: Prior to a flight in northwest Iowa, (L-R) Jim Lahn, district conservationist in LeMars, Dan Paulsen, area resource conservationist in Sioux City, Dave Gilbert, pilot, and John Myers, state resource conservationist in Des Moines, pose for a picture. Lahn was one of the primary employees documenting compliance from the air.

Middle: One of the pictures taken in the air shows a terrace system that is only partially reducing erosion.

Bottom: A common sight during the May flights was scoured areas such as this.



Wetland Mitigation: Instrument to Meet Needs for 5-10 Years

A new umbrella-type wetland mitigation bank is now available to serve USDA program participants with compensatory mitigation obligations. The tool provides an ecological and economically sustainable source of compensatory mitigation credits.

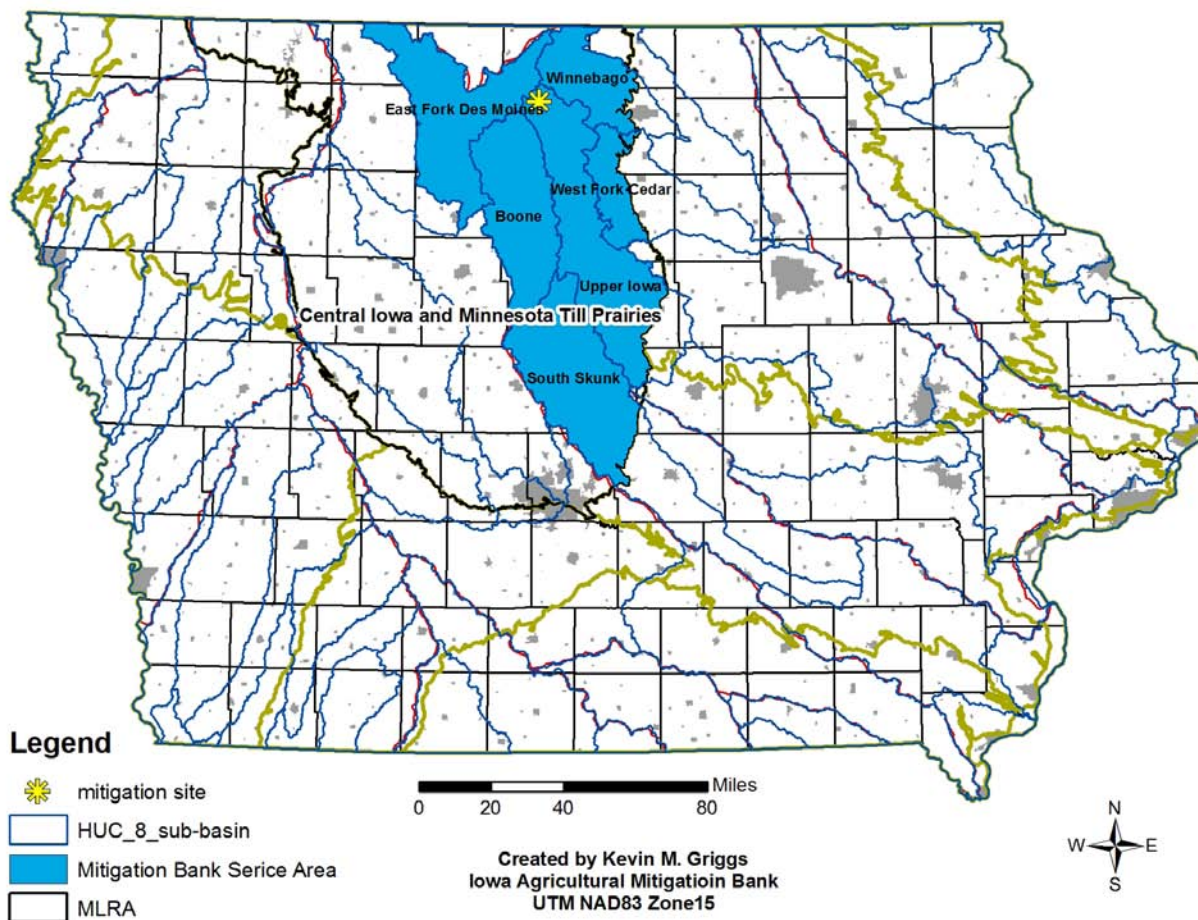
The project is beginning with a wetland mitigation site in Hancock County, the McLaughlin Trust Wetland Mitigation Site. Additional mitigation sites are expected to be added to the umbrella bank as market conditions for credits demand, suitable sites are identified, and project funding is available.

The mitigation bank development was made possible through a Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) to the Iowa League of RC&Ds. The map below shows the initial mitigation bank service area.



Iowa NRCS State Conservationist Rich Sims recently signed and approved the McLaughlin Trust Mitigation Site in Hancock County. Assistant State Conservationist for Water Resources Marty Adkins looks on.

Mitigation Bank Service Area Map



Honor Flight: Christensen Guardian for Two WWII Vets

The Brushy Creek Area Honor Flight flew 95 World War II veterans and 67 guardians from Fort Dodge to Washington, D.C. on May 7. Guardian Darrell Christensen, soil conservation technician in Webster City, accompanied his father-in-law U.S. Army veteran John Shaw and U.S. Navy veteran Richard Mason.

The guardians assisted veterans during the trip to make sure each was accounted for and to look after them, in general. Mason and Shaw are among 16,000 WWII veterans still alive today.

When their plane landed at Dulles Airport at 10 a.m. each veteran was greeted by Honor Flight volunteers. Then the veterans and guardians were loaded onto three buses and headed to the WWII Monument.

"It was a pleasant day for sightseeing and the veterans were able to visit each other and reflect on their service time," said Christensen.

He said many people come up to the veterans and thanked them for their service. "My father-in-law was sitting on a bench at the WWII Monument and a family approached him and thanked him for his service. The father was in his thirties and on active duty in the Army, and he asked if his three children could have their picture taken with John which he readily agreed to," said Christensen. "They chatted a few minutes and thanked him again before leaving."



As part of an Honor Flight to Washington D.C. for World War II veterans, Webster City Soil Conservation Technician Darrell Christensen (center) served as a Guardian for U.S. Navy veteran Richard Mason (right) and his father-in-law U.S. Army veteran John Shaw (left).

Other stops included the Korean and Vietnam Monuments, Arlington National Cemetery, Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and Iwo Jima Monument.

By 8 p.m. the Brushy Creek area WWII veterans boarded their jet at Dulles Airport for home. "There were lots of hugs and kisses, handshakes, and salutes from Girl and Boy Scouts," said Christensen.

Their plane landed at the Fort Dodge airport at 11 p.m. to a crowd that welcomed each veteran as they left the plane. "Richard and John remarked that it was overwhelming to receive all the thanks and recognition from friends and strangers," said Christensen.

Myers Retirement



John Myers, state resource conservationist for Iowa NRCS the past three years, will retire July 2.

The State Office Employees Association held a potluck in his honor June 2. A larger gathering is set for July 16 from 4 p.m. - 8 p.m. at Hickory Grove Lake Park in Story County.

Myers worked for SCS and NRCS for 33 years in Iowa, Virginia, North Carolina and Maryland.

Experience NRCS: Take Your Daughter and Son to Work Day

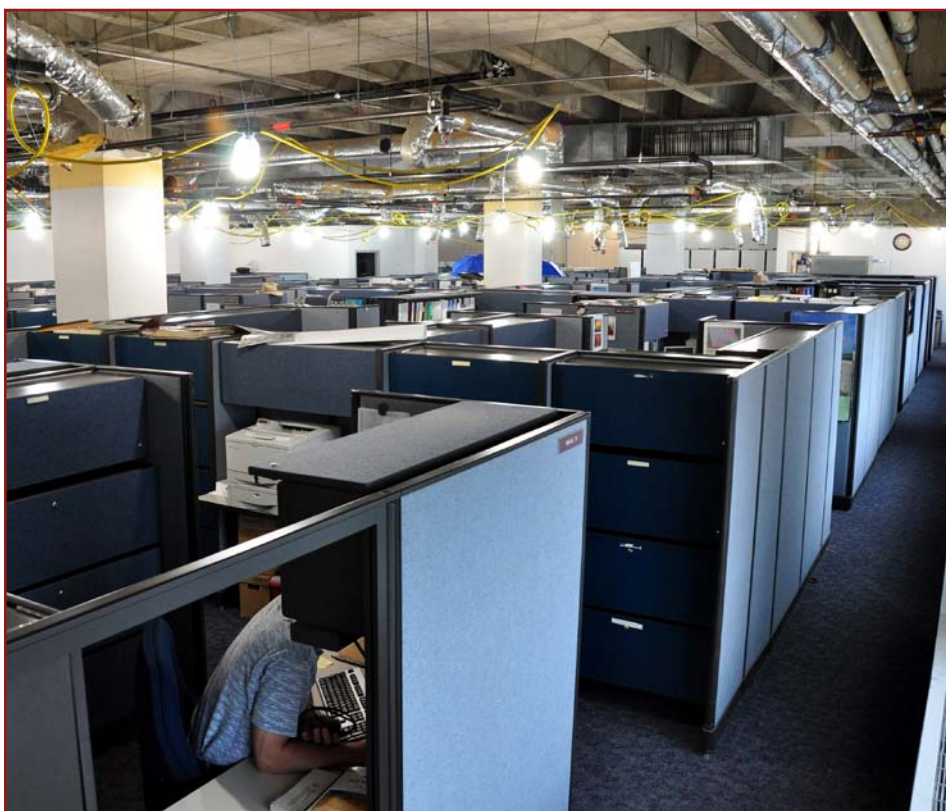
Several NRCS employees across the state participated in the Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work® program on April 28.

Marvin Hoffman, resource conservationist in Webster City, took daughters Cambria (16) and Grace (11) out to the field with him. The picture at right shows them standing by a raised bed of onions on the Lyle Evans farm in Hamilton County, with the structure of a seasonal high tunnel in the background.

In the State Office four kids visited the Federal Building. Activities included presentations from Tricia Mootz from human resources; Adam Stiegelmeier, state administrative officer; Rich Sims, state conservationist; and Richard Rogers, archeologist.



State Office: Under Construction



The Neal Smith Federal Building, home of the Iowa NRCS State Office, is undergoing improvement projects through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Construction is scheduled to be completed in 2012.

Improvements that will directly impact the NRCS office include:

- » Time of day controls for new air handling units.
- » A new motorized and controlled window blind system and highly reflective ceiling.
- » Remodeled restrooms.
- » HVAC upgrades and new plumbing and electrical fixtures.

Prescribed Burn: Agronomist Barb Stewart Executes Plan

Courtesy of Barb Stewart, State Agronomist

Having a burn plan and following the prescription is key for a safe, effective prairie burn.

My husband Randy and I made sure all precautions were taken before ever considering torching the 58 acres of tall grass prairie on our 160-acre farm in Wayne county. The farm is surrounded by timber and CRP. All of the firebreaks were prepared and firing procedure discussed.

On April 29th, the conditions were right and the contracting agent (Humeston Fire Department) made the call and the plan was put into place. A beautiful night burn turned into quite a block party. Prescribe burn is an effective tool for setting back invasive introduced species from invading the native prairie.



Water Sampling: Harlan Students Provide Community Service



Harlan Community High School students helped collect water sampling data in the Prairie Rose Lake Watershed for community service day on April 20.

"Since healthy water is vitally important in everyone's lives, monitoring plays an important role in educating our youth," said Rob Lawson, district conservationist for Iowa NRCS in Shelby County.

Shari Addy, soil conservationist with NRCS, trained the students on correct monitoring procedures. Students then tested for chloride, dissolved oxygen, nitrate, nitrite, pH, phosphate, water temperature, and transparency.

The Prairie Rose Lake Watershed testing is part of the statewide IOWATER volunteer water testing initiative, a citizen-based program managed by the Iowa Geological Survey section of the Department of Natural Resources. Discussions on water quality issues, upland conservation practices, and fish habitat were discussed during the service project.

The Shelby SWCD is in its final year of a three-year water quality project in the watershed. The goals of the project are to reduce sediment delivery and phosphorus loading to the lake by 60 percent and conduct outreach activities to raise awareness of water quality issues.

Longtime Running: Audubon SWCD Hosts 38th Straight Ecology Day



District Forester Lindsey Barney tells Audubon students how a hollowed out tree can continue to survive in the Littlefield Park Learning Center.

The Audubon Soil and Water Conservation District hosted their 38th Annual Ecology Field Day on May 5, at Littlefield Park for sixth graders in the Exira and Audubon School Districts.

About 50 students listened to presentation and toured the park's Learning Center. Representatives from the Iowa DNR, USDA-NRCS, Audubon SWCD, Iowa State University's Iowa Learning Farm, and several volunteers worked with the students in the areas of soil and water conservation, forestry, animals, and nature.

Fremont County: Conservation Education



Earth Day

On April 20, 78 biology students from Sidney High School, Fremont-Mills High School and Farragut High School met at Pinky's Glenn to celebrate Earth Day. Students learned about fish identification and bluebird houses, importance of tree planting, wetlands and restoration, and how to use global positioning systems.



Conservation Field Day

On May 12, 63 fourth and fifth graders from Sidney, Fremont-Mills, and Hamburg Elementary Schools met at Waubonsie State Park to attend the Fremont County Conservation Field Day. Student learned about prescribed fire practices, parks, wildlife predator prey relationships, insect life, forestry practices, fish identification and fishing, as well as a presentation from the Henry Doorly Zoo about native wildlife.

MRBI Video: Dubuque County Farmer to be Featured by USDA

Along with Missouri and Illinois, an Iowan will be featured in future USDA-produced videos about the Mississippi River Basin Healthy Watersheds Initiative (MRBI).

USDA videographer David Kosling videotaped Dubuque County farmer Tim Daly on June 7 side-dressing corn with Urea.

Matt Welsh, project coordinator for the Headwaters North Fork Maquoketa River Project, was interviewed for the video, along with ISU Extension Program Specialist Chad Ingels.



USDA videographer David Kosling shoots video of (from left) Matt Welsh, Headwaters North Fork Maquoketa River Project coordinator; Theresa Weiss, Dubuque County district conservationist; landowner Tim Daly; and Chad Ingels, ISU Extension program specialist.

Summer Student Employees: Going to Work in the Field



Iowa NRCS Student Employee Program participants Heidi Dittmer (left) and Jamie Sandoval (right) recently helped Area Resource Soil Scientist Julie McMichael with wetland determinations in Union County.

Dittmer is working in the Corydon Field Office and Sandoval is in the Creston Field Office. They are two of 15 students taking part in the program this summer.

Partner News: Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture

Updated Prairie Restoration Handbook Now Available

A handbook for establishing and managing prairies on farmland, "Incorporating Prairies into Multifunctional Landscapes," has gone into its second printing, and the updated version is now available from the Iowa State University Extension Online Store.

Less than 0.1% of Iowa's tallgrass prairies remain, largely because their rich soil makes the land desirable for agriculture. Yet prairies can reduce soil erosion and water pollution, provide wildlife habitat and mitigate flood events. The full-color, illustrated publication explains how farmers and landowners might incorporate prairies into their land to restore ecosystem services and potentially gain economic benefits from livestock grazing, hay production and carbon sequestration.

The content has been used in ISU classes and will also be part of an Extension program called "Homegrown Lifestyle," a 12-week course for people living on small acreages.

The updated version, which includes a new resource for Midwest prairie restoration, can be downloaded or print copies requested at no charge at <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/>. Look for publication PMR 1007.

Farming for Untroubled Waters: Research Goes Beyond Buffers

Water is a huge issue in agriculture – just ask an Iowa farmer waiting to plant corn after a wet spring. But what if there was a way to better manage water with existing conservation practices?

That's the idea behind two ongoing research projects funded by the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture at Iowa State University. The Center is betting that the answer may be related, at least in part, to riparian buffers.

The research is featured in three new videos, On the Ground with the Leopold Center. The short videos can be found on the Leopold Center web site at: www.leopold.iastate.edu/research/eco_files/ground.html, or on Iowa State's channels at iTunesU and YouTubeU.

More than two million miles of riparian buffers have been planted along U.S. streams and waterways. Most areas are not more than 60-80 ft. wide, with diversified plantings of native trees, shrubs and grasses. Above ground, plant biomass slows the flow of water into streams and stabilizes stream banks; below ground, plant root systems use nutrients carried by runoff from crop fields and filter water before entering streams. Water Survey.

Upcoming Workshop Spotlights Beneficial Insects

Farmers, researchers, and native plant aficionados are invited to a one-day workshop exploring how to enhance the ecosystem services provided by beneficial insects.

Iowa State University's Departments of Entomology and Natural Resource Ecology & Management, with support from the Leopold Center for Sustainable Agriculture, will host the workshop on Aug. 4.

Experts will discuss how to create resilient landscapes that provide multiple services, and federal and state programs that help support this form of conservation. Participants will have a chance to examine insect specimens and visit the Field Extension Education Laboratory (FEEL), where researchers are testing the ability of native plants to attract helpful species, like bees and lady beetles. from Agronomy, and Sarah Carlson from Practical Farmers of Iowa.

The workshop will take place at FEEL, five miles west of Ames. Register by July 15 at www.aep.iastate.edu/ent. Reduced hotel rates are available for out-of-town visitors through the ISU Memorial Union. Lunch will be provided.

Changes In: NRCS Personnel

In order of Effective Date

Name	Title	Effective Date	Nature of Action	Location
Praska, Michael	District Conservationist	4/23/11	Resignation	Cresco
Foreman, Laurel	Hydrologist	4/24/11	Reassignment to Water Resources Staff	Des Moines
Oskvig, Carroll	District Conservationist	4/30/11	Retirement	Spirit Lake
Gatlin, Cynthia	Soil Conservation Tech.	5/8/11	Promotion	Malcom
Hennigar, Tangela	Soil Conservationist	5/8/11	Last Name Change from Sinn	Clarion
Puffer, David	Soil Conservation Tech.	5/21/11	Resignation	Osage
Dixon, Joseph	Resource Conservationist	5/22/11	Reassignment	Muscatine
Christian, Carolyn	Contract Specialist	5/22/11	Promotion	Des Moines
Grimmius, Shelly	Secretary	5/22/11	Last Name Change from DuBay	Des Moines
Townley, Gregory	District Conservationist	5/22/11	Uniformed Service	Malcom
Friest, Lora	RC&D Coordinator	6/2/11	Resignation	Postville
Dettmann, Detra	RC&D Coordinator	6/3/11	Resignation	Fairfield
Perkins, Christa	RC&D Coordinator	6/6/11	Resignation	Burlington
Appelgate, Linda	RC&D Coordinator	6/30/11	Retirement	Ankeny
Myers, John	State Resource Cons.	7/2/11	Retirement	Des Moines

Changes In: IDALS-DSC Personnel

Name	Title	Nature of Action	Location
Abel, Chuck	Soil Technician	Left Employment	Warren SWCD
Osceola SWCD		Change in Address	No Longer P.O. Box Address 1672 Northwest Blvd. Sibley, IA 51249

Current Developments Stories and Photos

Please submit your Current Developments story ideas and photos to State Public Affairs Specialist Laura Greiner at laura.greiner@ia.usda.gov.

Current Developments is published six times per year. Past issues can be found at www.ia.nrcs.usda.gov/intranet/currentdevelopments.html.